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## Viewing cable 09BUENOSAIRES1263, MTCR: UPDATE ON ARGENTINA'S SPACE LAUNCH VEHICLE (SLV)

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09BUENOSAIRES1263**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">09BUENOSAIRES1263</a>	<a href="#">2009-12-03 17:49</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Buenos Aires</a>

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1367868-eeuu-temio-un-plan-para-revivir-el-misil-condor>

VZCZCXYZ0001  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBU #1263/01 3371749  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 031749Z DEC 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0139  
INFO MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE  
MISSILE TECHNOLOGY CONTROL REGIME COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 001263

SIPDIS  
FOR ISN/MTR - PAM DURHAM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/12/03  
TAGS: [MTCRE](#) [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [MNUC](#) [ETTC](#) [TSPA](#) [AR](#)  
SUBJECT: MTCR: UPDATE ON ARGENTINA'S SPACE LAUNCH VEHICLE (SLV)  
PROGRAM

REF: STATE 01759

CLASSIFIED BY: Thomas P. Kelly, DCM, State, EXEC; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

[¶](#)1. (C) Summary: ESTHCouns met on December 2 with Conrado Varotto,

Executive Director of CONAE (the Argentine space agency), to discuss the latest developments in Argentina's space launch vehicle (SLV) program (reftel). Varotto reported three unsuccessful ground tests of the SLV engine and said that a fourth would take place shortly. He reiterated his commitment to full transparency about the SLV program. Varotto also expressed serious concerns about recent developments that could force CONAE to share part of or even surrender its Cordoba space center for the fabrication of military solid fuel rockets, a project allegedly pushed by Planning Minister Julio De Vido. Varotto said he had asked Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana to personally appeal to President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) and explain that to share the space center with military fabrication would spell the end of Argentina's civilian space program. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Varotto first provided updates on the development of the SLV. So far, he said, CONAE had conducted three tests of the engine on the ground, all three unsuccessful, with a fourth test planned for mid-December. The engine exploded in the first two tests, due to liquid fuel leaks, and failed on the third, due to materials problems with the exhaust. Varotto noted that CONAE has no intention of attempting a launch until the engine is thoroughly and successfully tested on the ground.

¶3. (C) Varotto also informed ESTHCouns about the planned launch on December 17 of a sounding rocket by the Ministry of Defense's research agency, CITEFA. He noted that he had received an invitation from CITEFA to attend the launch, which erroneously touted it as part of the SLV program. Varotto said he had written to CITEFA to protest this characterization and to decline to attend the launch. He explained that CONAE had only requested from CITEFA that it allow CONAE to fit test guidance equipment atop the sounding rocket in order to test the equipment at high altitude, nothing more. By no means is CONAE cooperating with CITEFA on the SLV development, he stressed.

¶4. (C) Varotto was worried about what could be perceived as a ""militarization"" of CONAE's purely civilian SLV development program. He reiterated his complete commitment to transparency and wanted to ensure that Washington was informed. He believed that CITEFA had misunderstood the extent of its cooperation with CONAE. ""We have no written agreement to cooperate with CITEFA on the space launch vehicle,"" Varotto said, ""and it makes no sense for us to do so."" He explained that the SLV is designed as a liquid fuel launcher, while CITEFA only handles solid fuel rockets.

¶5. (C) Asking for confidentiality, Varotto then shared a ""serious"" issue he believed could affect CONAE's SLV program. He said that French military equipment manufacturer Dassault had contacted Fabricaciones Militares (a state company under Planning Minister De Vido) to explore the possibility of refurbishing old Argentine military solid fuel short-range (30-40 km) rockets, for subsequent sales to the region. Officials from Fabricaciones Militares had visited CONAE's space center in Cordoba, where the SLV is being developed. Varotto said he later found out that the reason for the visit was that the Ministry of Planning was considering the use of some of CONAE's facilities and machinery for the fabrication of solid-fuel rockets. Varotto said he immediately contacted Foreign Minister Taiana (the titular head of Argentina's space program) to state unequivocally that CONAE was totally opposed to any military use of its facilities. ""This would mean the end of the Argentine SLV program,"" he stressed, ""and someone would have to take responsibility for this.""

¶6. (C) While Dassault appears in the end to have decided to negotiate with the Brazilians rather than the Argentines, Varotto said that Fabricaciones Militares is now considering moving forward with its own project of manufacturing rockets for the use of the

Argentine military and for regional military sales. He said that Planning Minister Julio De Vido is pushing this idea to completely retool CONAE's space center to manufacture military rockets. The situation has now escalated into a confrontation between FM Taiana against Planning Minister DeVido and Defense Minister Nilda Garre,

Varotto said. He added that he had asked FM Taiana to make a personal appeal to the President. "It is an existential question for us," he said, "and that is why I am appealing to the President." Varotto was adamant that "to share our civilian space center with military fabrication means the end of our SLV program." He stressed that CONAE is totally opposed to having the two projects cohabitate within the same center. Moreover, he said, the space center is entirely focused on the development of liquid fuel boosters and is simply not tooled for large-scale fabrication of solid fuel rockets.

17. (C) Comment: Varotto was clearly worried about damage to his credibility, and he insisted that his unwavering commitment to full transparency be relayed to Washington. Argentina's space program involves much more than the SLV project, as CONAE has for many years pursued very productive cooperation with NASA on the design and building of satellites (the latest one, SAC-D, to be launched from California at the end of 2010.) Varotto does not want rumors and a possible military use of his space center to jeopardize space cooperation with the United States. In the end, he trusts that CFK will maintain the long-standing civilian focus of space research and let CONAE retain exclusive use of its space center in Cordoba. End Comment.  
MARTINEZ